[H. PRIDEAUX]

III

A

Letter to a Friend

Relating to the preſent

CONVOCATION

AT

Weſtminſter.

LONDON,

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer* at the Three Pigeons againſt the *Royal Exchange* in *Cornhill*. MDCXC.

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Relating to the Present Convocation at *Westminster*.

SIR,

I Have fully considered what you have been pleased to offer to me in yours concerning the Convocation now met at *Westminster*, and the Alterations intended to be made therein in the present Offices, Rites and Constitutions of our Church, and all what you say I apprehend to be reducible to these three heads: 1. *That no alterations ought at all to be made in things pertaining to Religion but when there is a very great necessity for it.* 2. *That at present there is no such necessity for the alterations intended.* And, 3. *That, if there were, this is no time for it, when so many of the Fathers of our Church, and other eminent persons of the Clergy do now by their suspension stand incapacitated to act with us in this matter.*

As to the first, I readily grant what you say, That nothing is more dangerous to Religion, than frequently to make alterations in the things pertaining thereto, because an unsteadiness as to these, although in outward circumstantials onely, which are always alterable, may to many become an argument against the whole. For there being multitudes among us who are not able to distinguish between what is circumstantial and what is essential in our Worship, what is in the power of the Church to alter, and what is not, and are apt to call every alteration though in things merely indifferent,

and which the variation of times have made totally insignificant to the first end of their establishment, to be a change of the Religion it self; and therefore concluding that we have no firm bottom at all for that which they see us so often vary from, may from hence be induced to cast off all regard both for our Church and the Worship of God established therein, and become Apostates from us either to Popery or Atheism all their life after. For the prevention whereof I readily grant what you say, That such alterations ought not to be attempted but when there is an absolute necessity for them. And therefore the Church of *England* may be justifyed in her Proceedings hitherto, that she hath not been forward on every demand of the Dissenters to unhinge those of her Communion from her long received establishments, but hath to the utmost resisted all alterations from them, hoping by other less dangerous methods to cure the distractions and heal the divisions that are among us. But when after her utmost tryal of all other ways they have all proved ineffectual to attain the end proposed, and the Church hath still grown weaker and weaker, and those that dissent from it still stronger and stronger under all those attempts which have been made use of for the reuniting them to us, so that now we are brought to that pass, that without coming to a temper with them, and abating something on our side for the sake of peace and union with them, we cannot have that prospect as formerly of supporting the Church of God and maintaining the Honour of his Worship with success among us. I think now to make such alterations as are proposed a thing so absolutely necessary as ought not any longer to be deferr'd. And this I hope I shall be able clearly to convince you of in answer to your second head of objection, from these following reasons.

For,

For, first, There lyes an indispensable obligation upon us to doe the utmost we are able to remove this mischievous Schism from among us, which hath so long disturb'd the Church of Christ in this Land. How prejudicial this hath been to the Honour of God and the Salvation of Men, and how advantageous to the encrease of Popery and Atheism, and the propagating also of all manner of iniquity among us, is that which by wofull experience is too well known unto you to need a description: And all this evil most certainly must lye at our doors as far as we doe not the utmost that in us lyeth to remove it, and what other way is there now left of attempting it but by coming to some terms of moderation and temper with those that dissent from us. We have already tryed all methods of persuasion to mollifie them, all force of argumentation to convince them; we have tryed also Church Censures and Penal Laws, and inflicted them too with a severity perchance beyond what we can justifie; and what have we availed our selves of all this, but onely to heighten the divisions and increase the mischief which we endeavoured to remove; and therefore what other remedy is now left us, what other means for us to have recourse to for the curing of this prevailing evil among us, but that, as far as we are able we abate of that which hath given the whole origin thereto; those excepted passages in our Liturgy, and those ceremonies in our Worship which our dissenting Brethren cannot conform with us in. And for this the late Act of Toleration hath added a very pressing necessity. For when our divisions ran so high, and our animosities against each other so far increased as that Dissenters were driven by them to take shelter from us in the Camp of our common Enemy, and join with the Papists against us to the endangering both of Church and State to utter ruin. The Parliament then thought

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it time to provide for the publick Safety by reconciling thoſe men thereto by an Act of Toleration and Indulgence, whereby they being now put upon as good a bottom of legal right and protection as we our ſelves, there is no other way left us of coming to a union with them but by following the ſame ſteps which the State hath gone in before us, and by condeſcenſion and abatements to reconcile thoſe men unto us: For they are now no more in our power to force them to a conformity with us than we are in theirs, and therefore they being on equal terms with us of right and protection from the Government under which we live, treaty and mutual abatement is the onely method now whereby we can be brought to a union with each other; and why we ſhould not abate for the ſake of this which carrieth with it a promiſe of ſo great good and benefit to the Church of Chriſt among us, I would deſire a reaſon from him that is able to give it. For what are thoſe things which we differ about, that we muſt for ever ſacrifice to them the peace both of Church and State without abating the leaſt tittle for ſo great a good as that of the common union of Chriſtians among us? are a few excepted paſſages in our Liturgy, and two or three ceremonies in our Worſhip things of ſo great value that we muſt for the ſake of them ſtill maintain thoſe diſcords and diviſions both in Church and State which have ſo long haraſſed both almoſt to utter ruine? Is it not enough that we have had already a twenty years War about them? and, is it not enough, that ever ſince our deliverance from that, for the ſake of thoſe trifles, we have for theſe thirty years laſt paſt driven up our diviſions and animoſities againſt each other to that height as that we had almoſt totally given up our Church to Popery and our Government to Tyranny thereby? Certainly, after all this, it's time to ſit down and conſider whether

ther those things are of such great value for the sake of which we bring so much mischief to this poor distressed Church and Nation, that nothing must be abated of that unreasonable rigor whereby we have hitherto maintained them. And if the consideration of things past cannot move us, I beseech you, consider a little the present posture of our affairs; we have a formidable Enemy in our neighbourhood now engaged in War against us, who thinks of nothing less than subjugating these three Kingdoms to his absolute Tyranny, and imposing Popish Idolatry and Superstition upon all the Inhabitants of them; and that which gives him the greatest advantage against us, and the greatest hopes for our destruction is, our divisions among our selves at home which enfeeble both our hearts and hands for the battel, and make us unable to resist him with that success which formerly used to attend most of our other expeditions against Enemies altogether as potent; and what remedy have we left to prevent this terrible ruin that now so formidably threatens us, but to come to as firm a union among our selves as we are able? and could but this be once happily effected, we need not fear all the power of *France* and *Rome* in the firmest union against us; but should be strong enough to resist all their efforts for our ruin; and, by the blessing of God, still continue in safety, in spight of all the endeavours of both to the contrary. And since it hath pleased God to move the King to call us together in Convocation in this conjuncture, I hope we shall not let slip this opportunity of doing the utmost we are able to unite the Nation now our affairs do so much require it for the publick safety thereof. For the expectations of all men are now upon us for this purpose, and the hopes of preserving Church and State in the great dangers under which they are now both involv'd, do in a great measure depend upon what we shall

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doe for our common Peace now met together and put in a way to remove those obstacles which have so long disturbed it. Have we not already lost our reputation with the people of the Land by insisting too rigorously on those things? And now we have in a great measure again retriev'd it by our firm and successfull engagement against the Popish cause, shall we be so far infatuated as again to run the same risk? will we but now come to that temper and moderation in our establishments as may remove that bone of contention which hath so long disturbed us, and think of such abatements as may tend to the setling of Peace and Union among us, the mouths of all this people shall bless us, and we shall acquire thereby that veneration and regard among them that they shall all look on us as the onely faithfull Shepherds whose voice they are to hear, and we thereby be enabled to discharge the duties of our Ministry among them with that comfort to our selves and benefit to them as shall soon fix our Church upon a foundation never more to be shaken by any of its Enemies. But if on the contrary we still persist in our old rigor, and abate no expression in our Liturgy, nor ceremony in our Worship, for the sake of so great a good; for my part, I can expect nothing less than that we become abhorr'd of the whole Nation, as the common Enemies of its peace, and be treated accordingly in every Parish where we live among them. Were those matters in which abatements are desired of us by our dissenting Brethren things of that moment that they either carried with them the force of a divine Institution, or were of their own nature so necessary to our Worship that either the Honour of God or the Interest of mans Salvation should suffer the least prejudice by their omission, it would become us then, whatever the Consequences should be, to stick to them to the utmost, and with

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the ſame conſtancy as formerly the ancient Chriſtians did againſt the *Arrians*, not yield a letter to them to end the whole controverſie between us. But notwithſtanding what our learned Prolocutor hath been pleaſed in his Latin Speech to the Convocation to ſuggeſt, this is by no means our preſent caſe. For what Article of Faith, what neceſſary requiſite of our Worſhip is it in which any alterations are at all intended to be propoſed in this preſent Convocation? if he knows of any ſuch, he would doe well to diſcover them, and when they come to be offered, oppoſe them to the utmoſt. But, alas, the alterations intended, how great oppoſitions ſoever they may meet with, are ſo far from touching upon any thing of this nature, that I can aſſure him, and he himſelf well knows it, as being one of the Commiſſion, where they are prepared, that they are onely in thoſe indifferent things, which have through all ages of the Church from the beginning been ever allowed to be alterable, whenſoever the good of the Church ſhould require it. And therefore ſince at preſent (as I have ſhown) not onely the good of the Church in order to the eſtabliſhment of its peace among us, but alſo the publick intereſt of the State too in order to its preſervation in its preſent exigencies do ſo much require that thoſe alterations ſhould be made, why do we ſo obſtinately ſtick at thoſe matters, whereby not onely the cauſe of God in the welfare of his Church, but our own alſo in the publick intereſt of the Nation, is ſo greatly prejudiced by us? As it is a great errour in ſome of our diſſenting Brethren to allow nothing lawfull to be made uſe of in our publick Worſhip but what they find particular warrant for in Scripture, ſo is it no leſs a miſtake in us to hold any thing of this nature not preſcribed there to be unalterable. For our Saviour having given us his divine Law, and therein a-

mong other Precepts, commanded in the Worſhip of God, the Celebration of his Sacraments, and the Government of his Church for the better influencing of every member of it to all the duties enjoined, for this very reaſon deſcended not to preſcribe the particular manner, rites and conſtitutions which his Church afterwards made uſe of in the performance of all this, becauſe it was impoſſible that any unalterable rule could at all be given of thoſe matters. For the reaſon of theſe being only decency and order in the Church of God, and to be as helps therein the better to influence the minds of men to the performance of the Divine Commands muſt neceſſarily be of their own nature variable, according as to the different variations of times, circumſtances and the cuſtoms of men they more or leſs become capable of anſwering the end deſign'd, and therefore have ever been in the power of the Church to conſtitute, alter and aboliſh them according as the honour of God, the good of his Church and the intereſt of Religion might be beſt promoted thereby. As long therefore as theſe Forms of Prayer which are uſed in our Church, and thoſe Rites and Conſtitutions which are received therein do anſwer the end of their firſt eſtabliſhment in being uſefull to the promoting the honour of God and the edification of his people, ſo long they ought with conſtancy always to be retained; but when either the infirmity or the wickedneſs of men, or any other cauſe hath made that alteration in the Times, and in the humours and cuſtoms of thoſe that live in them, that theſe things inſtead of conducing any longer to that good end propoſed, do on the contrary adminiſter only to Schiſm and Diviſion in the Church, and to diſtraction and diſcord in the State, whereby the peace of both is miſerably diſturb'd, as is too manifeſtly our caſe; from hence there ariſeth a reaſon altogether as ſtrong for their alteration, as ever there was at firſt for

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their inſtitution. Were they become only uſeleſs and no longer anſwered their end, this would be a ſufficient reaſon alone for an alteration in them, but when over and above they become miſchievous too in the evils that they bring both upon Church and State this adds an obligation, which cannot I think without guilt be reſiſted, of coming to a change in theſe matters.

And to come to the particular things controverted between us, I readily aſſent that the Croſs in Baptiſm had a very good reaſon for its firſt inſtitution: For when in the primitive times the Heathens made it a matter of conſtant reproach to the Chriſtians, that they worſhipped a crucified God, they for this reaſon appointed the Croſs after Baptiſm to be thenceforth put as a Badge upon all whom they received into the Church, to let them know, that they ought not to be aſhamed hereof. And I doubt not but that it was of excellent uſe in thoſe times to fortifie the minds of Chriſtians with that conſtancy and reſolution as was requiſite to bear them up againſt the ſcoffs and reproaches of their Heathen Adverſaries amongſt whom they lived. But now Heatheniſm hath ſo many Ages ſince been totally extinguiſhed in thoſe parts of the World, and we live in a State which is totally Chriſtian, ſo that the Croſs of Chriſt is no longer liable of being objected to us as a reproach by any, it cannot be denied but that this Ceremony hath now totally loſt its uſe, and although it might innocently enough be ſtill retain'd, yet may it with as much innocency alſo be totally laid aſide now the alterations of times have made it wholly uſeleſs to the end for which it was firſt deſigned. But in our preſent circumſtances, when it is become not only uſeleſs but alſo miſchievous to the cauſe of Chriſt by reaſon of the Diſſenſions and Schiſms which it occaſions in his Church, and is thereby inſtead of a badge of Union and Chriſtian con-

ſtancy under the banner of the Captain of our Salvation, as was firſt intended, become an Enſign of war to make us fight againſt each other, and a Croſs of torment thereon again to crucifie the Lord of life in his body the Church, and rent its bowels aſunder by thoſe lamentable diviſions which it cauſeth among us; in this caſe I think we have an obligation upon us not to be reſiſted from the abſolute neceſſity of the thing, either totally to lay this Ceremony aſide, or elſe make ſuch abatements concerning its uſe, as may allay all theſe heats of contention and miſchiefs of ſeparation which have been cauſed in the Church of Chriſt thereby. And I here plainly aver that the Church of *England* cannot be guiltleſs in this matter, if ſhe doth not on this opportunity, now put into her hands by this preſent meeting of the Convocation, doe ſomething herein, and that eſpecially ſince by an unwary expreſſion in her Canons, wherein ſhe hath explained this Ceremony to be that whereby the perſon baptized is dedicated to the ſervice of Jeſus Chriſt, ſhe hath wrongfully attributed thereto the ſacramental effect which belongs to Baptiſm onely, and thereby adminiſtred a great part of the occaſion to all the diviſions which have been riſen about it.

2. As to the Surplice I am ſufficiently ſatisfied that nothing is more unreaſonable than thoſe Cavils which are riſen againſt it. For it is onely an habit of diſtinction, which the Miniſter for the ſake of order and decency makes uſe of in the execution of his Function in the ſame manner as is practiſed in all other Offices and Profeſſions of men, and thoſe that except againſt it may as well except againſt the Robes of a Judge on the Bench, or the Gown of a Mayor when he preſides in his Corporation, it being altogether as reaſonable that a Miniſter ſhould be diſtinguiſhed by a proper habit in the execution of his Office, as they in theirs. But when through

through the malice of ſome in working ſtrange objections againſt it into the minds of men, and the weakneſs of others in receiving and believing them, it is now become ſo great a ſtumbling-block of offence as to drive multitudes to forſake our Churches, and be diſaffected to the Worſhip of God which is performed in them; whatſoever was the reaſon of its firſt appointment, ſure I am that from hence there is a much greater totally to lay it aſide, and appoint another that may be leſs offenſive in its ſtead. The Union of the Church and the Benefit which the Souls of men may receive thereby being certainly things of far greater moment than to be ſacrificed to ſo trivial a matter as that of a Garment.

3. Kneeling at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a poſture ſo proper to that Holy Ordinance, that of all the Conſtitutions of our Church, this is the laſt I ſhould be willing to part with; becauſe I think the higheſt poſture of Devotion is that which is always moſt natural for us to be in when we are receiving from Chriſt ſo great and ineſtimable Benefits as thoſe which are reached out unto us in that Holy Myſtery. But ſince the weakneſs of many who are good and well meaning men have been ſo far impoſed on by ſeveral fallacious arguments which they have not skill enough to ſee through, as to think it ſinfull to receive in this poſture, and hereby the Table of the Lord becomes deſerted, and the Souls of many deprived of the benefit of that Spiritual Food which is adminiſtred thereon, contrary to the intention of our Saviour, who hath by no means impowred us on any ſuch account as this to debar men from Communion, and deprive them thereby of thoſe Benefits of Salvation which we are ſent to adminiſter unto them, it is time for us now to abate of our rigor in this matter; and when we are not able to bring men up by reaſon of their weakneſs to the Conſtitutions of

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the Church, be ſo far indulgent as to deſcend to them; and give them the Sacrament in their own way, rather than for the ſake of a poſture onely debar them of the Benefits which their Souls may receive thereby; and to doe otherwiſe I doubt will not onely be a Sin againſt Chriſtian Charity, in prejudicing the Salvation of many, but alſo be an abuſe of the Commiſſion intruſted with us. For I can by no means be perſuaded that Chriſt hath given us the power of the Keys to ſhut out thoſe from the Benefits of this Sacrament who in all other reſpects being good and righteous men, have onely this weakneſs, that they cannot comply with us in receiving thereof in that poſture which the Church preſcribes, and for which it hath no other warrant but its own Conſtitutions. For how fitting a poſture ſoever Kneeling may be for the receiving of this Sacrament, this muſt undeniably be allowed, that neither Scripture directs it, nor Antiquity ever uſed it; it having been for ſeveral ages after Chriſt the conſtant practice of all the Churches in the World to communicate Standing, and why this may not again by a particular diſpenſation from the preſent eſtabliſhment be allowed to weak and ſcrupulous perſons for the ſake of peace and union with them, I can ſee no reaſon that favours either of a Chriſtian temper or Chriſtian Charity that can be ſaid to the contrary.

4. As to the Liturgy of our Church I freely acknowledge, and I think no man can contradict me herein, that it is the beſt which was ever yet uſed in any Chriſtian Church, but that it ſhould therefore be ſo perfect as not to be capable of amendments or alterations for the better doth by no means follow. For nothing of humane compoſure can be ſuch, eſpecially in a thing of this nature, where proceſs of time and alteration of circumſtances frequently produce a neceſſity for correction, as moſt certain-

certainly in our Liturgy they very often doe. For the language in which it is wrote being conſtantly *in fluxu*, as all other living languages are, in every age ſome words that were in uſe in the former grow obſolete, and ſome phraſes and expreſſions formerly in grace and faſhion through diſuſe become uncouth and ridiculous, and always to continue theſe in our Liturgy without correction would be to bring a diſparagement upon the whole, and expoſe to contempt the worſhip of God among us. Beſides there are ſeveral things which in one age may conduce to devotion, which through variation of times and circumſtances may not be born in another; ſeveral things which may be the proper matter of Prayer at one time which may not be ſo in another, and all thoſe things call for alterations and amendments whenever they happen. And therefore I am ſo far from aſſenting with ſome of our Brethren in this particular, that our Liturgy ought not to be altered, that I think it abſolutely neceſſary from the abovementioned particulars that it be always at leaſt once in 30 years brought to a review for this purpoſe. And I am ſure this hath been the judgment of the whole Chriſtian Church from the beginning till this time. The Greek Church hath ſo often altered as to this, and made ſo many different forms of their Liturgies, that a Collection of them in a late Auction amounted to twenty Volumes; and the Latin Church who brag moſt of their conſtancy in theſe matters have rather exceeded than come behind them herein, as in the old Manuſcripts of their Liturgies will ſufficiently appear to any that will take the pains to look into them. Nay they were ſo far from continuing one age in conformity with another herein, that they obſerved none at all in this matter, but almoſt every Province had its different Liturgy, and it's well known that there were five different forms of them in this Kingdom till the Reformation, and the like was

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alſo practiſed in other parts of the Latin or Romiſh Church, and a general Agreement as to this was then ſo far from being thought neceſſary, That the Act of King *Edward* the VIth was the firſt Law for a uniform Liturgy in any Church that was ever enacted from the beginning of Chriſtianity to that time. But neither did that exclude all varying from it in after times. The Liturgy that was firſt eſtabliſhed in that King's reign, within a very little while after underwent a review, which produced very conſiderable alterations in it. And when Q. *Eliz.* came to the Crown many others were made therein. And thoſe who compute the late alterations decreed in the Convocation of 1662. tell us they amount to the number of 400. And why we onely of this preſent time ſhould be debarred the privilege of bettering our ſelves in this matter, which all other times of the Church before us have enjoyed, I would fain know a reaſon. Thus far ſure I am that no time had ever more need to make uſe of it for the publick good than this in which we now live. For the Exigences of the State call loudly upon us to doe that herein which may tend to its ſafety, and the peace of the Church and the intereſt of Religion plead as hard on the other hand to the ſame purpoſe, for the removing of animoſities and diviſions, and the reſtoring of Union and Charity among us. And what can we ſay for our ſelves if we continue deaf as to all this? But to come to the Liturgy it ſelf; are there not many things in it which with ſome ſhew of reaſon our diſſenting Brethren except againſt? and are there not many more which we our ſelves heartily wiſh might be amended and improved? certainly, were there no other reaſon to induce us to comply with our Brethren that diſſent from us, in making ſuch alterations as would ſatisfie them, I ſhould think this a very ſufficient one, that

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that we have an opportunity given us at the ſame time alſo to gratifie our ſelves in ſuch further alterations and improvements which we our ſelves deſire. For muſt the Story of *Tobit* and his Dog and that of *Bell* and the Dragon always ſupplant Canonical Scripture in our Churches, and we be forced to read ſuch ridiculous things to our people inſtead of the Word of God? muſt we always be forced to read the old Tranſlation of the Pſalms, and impoſe that on the people for true Scripture, which in ſo great a number of places quite differs from it? muſt we always be forced in our addreſſes to God Almighty with a flattery not to be warranted, to call every King that reigns over us moſt Religious, though the whole tenor of his life may be quite the contrary; and pray that he may be kept and ſtrengthned in the true worſhipping of God, though openly profeſſing ſo falſe a worſhip as that of Popery? And muſt we alſo be forced ſtill to put that abuſe upon the power of the Keys committed to our charge, as to excommunicate, and thereby thruſt out of our Churches ſometimes the beſt of our people for being right or wrong overthrown in ſome penny or twopenny Cauſe in our Eccleſiaſtical Courts? And muſt we always be neceſſitated to pronounce all damn'd that do not believe every tittle in *Athanaſius*'s Creed which ſo few do underſtand; and on the contrary to declare every man ſav'd at his burial how wickedly ſoever he liv'd all his life before? And muſt we always be bound to many other grievances and defects of this nature, which I could tell you of, and ſtill deny our ſelves all redreſs under the burden of them, by refuſing all thoſe deſirable alterations and improvements which are now in our own power to effect, becauſe ſome of our Brethren are obſtinately bent to doe nothing for the ſatisfaction of thoſe that diſſent from us? In ſumm, it cannot be denied, but that there are many things in our

Liturgy which may be amended and improved, many defects in our Diſcipline and Conſtitutions which may be ſupplied, and abundance of other particulars in our Church which may receive a great advance for the better enabling us to promote Religion and Piety, and ſuppreſs ſin and iniquity among us. And ſince the King and Parliament are now ſo well inclined to comply with us in all theſe particulars, which we have ſo often laboured for in vain in other times, provided that we will on our ſide doe what juſtly we may to ſatisfie our diſſenting Brethren for the ſake of peace and union among us, which the neceſſities of our preſent circumſtances doe ſo much require for our common ſafety; it is a barter of that advantage on our ſide, that none I think can refuſe that have any regard to the honour of God, the good of his Church, or the true intereſt of Religion among us.

But to all what I have ſaid I very well know many objections will be made, which I daily hear from thoſe who are of your opinion in this matter. The firſt is, That altering any thing in this now conſtituted Church will be like the plucking of a Beam out of a well built Houſe, and that it cannot be done without endangering the whole Fabrick. To this I anſwer, If all had been of this mind we could never have reformed from Popery, becauſe this Argument would have been as ſtrong againſt all alterations then as now; but I thank God we altered for the better then, and ſtill preſerv'd our Church, and therefore I hope we may be able to doe ſo ſtill without any prejudice thereto.

2. It is objected, If we once begin to alter, where ſhall we ſtop? To this I anſwer, Whenſoever any thing is propoſed to us which is not fit to be done.

3. It's objected, If we yield now, they will ſtill be craving more, and never reſt till at laſt they have taken

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all from us. To which I answer, When they doe this, then it will be time enough to resist them; in the *interim* let us not refuse them what is just and fitting for us to grant them, lest thereby we make good the old Saying, *Omnia dat qui justa negat*; and we give them an advantage against us, by our obstinate rigor against yielding any thing, to get that power on their side which may deprive us of all.

4. It's objected, That some of those alterations which they require are in things as ancient as the Primitive Church, from which we ought not to vary, as may be instanced in the Cross in Baptism. To which I answer, That we are not bound to retain all things that were used in the Primitive Church. For if so, why have we not still their Love-feasts and their Deaconesses, which have been long since disused in all Christian Churches, and yet the mention of them is as ancient as the Scriptures themselves. For in truth it is not ancient usage, but the necessities and exigencies of the Church that are the reasons of all its constitutions and establishments, which are to be framed in every Age as will best suite with the promoting of the honour of God, and the edification of his People, to which abundance of things might very well serve in the primitive times, which will not now; and therefore to say, that what was in use, in the primitive times must be retained now for this reason onely without any other to enforce it is just the same as if we were bound to revive all the old *Saxon* and *British* Laws, because they were the ancient Constitutions of this Land, without considering whether they are usefull to us or no.

5. The fifth Objection is, That it will be a reproach to change. To which I answer, That it will be a much greater reproach obstinately to resist a change when there is good reason for it. And therefore I cannot approve

the confidence of that Gentleman, who hath lift up his banner againſt the whole intent and deſign of this Convocation, with a *Nolumus Leges Angliæ mutare.* For doth he think we are bound never to make any new Conſtitutions in our Church, or aboliſh old ones, according as the exigencies of it doe require? If ſo, why have we any Convocations at all? for is not the whole intent and reaſon of theſe aſſemblies of the Clergy of this Church, to conſider its grievances and corruptions in the ſame manner as the Parliament doth thoſe of the State, and from time to time, in like manner, provide remedies for them, and that by aboliſhing old Conſtitutions, as well as by decreeing new ones? and hath not the Church ever aſſerted this power as one of the moſt eſſential things which belong to its Conſtitution? and muſt it now renounce all this for the ſake of this Gentleman's *motto?* and now, in this critical time, when its ſafety doth ſo much depend upon what it ſhall doe for it ſelf, rather ſit quietly down and languiſh to death, than make the leaſt motion of effort to ſave it ſelf. If this be it which this Gentleman would have, we have no reaſon to thank him either for his Speech or his *Motto*, the laſt of which, I ſuppoſe, pleaſed him beſt, becauſe it carried a double ſtab with it, the one againſt the Church, and the other againſt him that was his greateſt benefactor to promote him in it.

6. The ſixth Objection is, That we have no reaſon to alter any thing for the ſake of Diſſenters, becauſe the fault of our diviſions is not from any Conſtitutions of ours, but from their obſtinacy and perverſeneſs in unreaſonably diſſenting from them. To which I anſwer, That I acknowledge all this to be true, that it is not the Church which is the Cauſe of our diviſions by any of its conſtitutions or impoſitions, which are all rational and good, but they onely who refuſe to conform to them.

them. But it doth not follow therefore, that when nothing elſe will remove the diviſions now raiſed among us on the account of theſe things, or again reduce Diſſenters to the Unity of the Church, but ſome alterations in them, (which without the leaſt prejudice to our Church, or the Worſhip of God therein we may lawfully make) it may not be a great fault in us now to be over obſtinate in theſe matters, and that we ought not rather when there is before us ſo great a good, as the Peace of the Church and the Salvation of ſo many therein (which it's to be fear'd may be too much obſtructed by theſe diviſions) be ready to comply with them as far as lawfully we may for the ſake hereof. For they being the ſick and the infirm whom we are ſent to heal, our part to them muſt be that of a Phyſician, who, when he finds his Patient, through that peeviſhneſs which is commonly incident to the ſick, obſtinately refuſe an wholſom medicine which he preſcribes him, doth not for this reaſon immediately caſt off all care of him, but thinks of ſomething elſe more agreeable to his palate and humour, that may doe as well.

7. The ſeventh Objection is, If we make thoſe alterations and ſo often change, how ſhall we anſwer the Papiſts, who will upbraid us with it? To this I anſwer, As well as we did in the firſt of Queen *Elizabeth*, and in 1662. or, if this be an Objection, as well as they can us for their alterations by the Council of *Trent*, the late reformation of their Maſs-books at *Paris*, and the laſt Pope's aboliſhing ſeveral Offices concerning the Virgin *Mary*.

8. The eighth Objection is, We ſhall by theſe alterations diſſatisfie our own People. To which I anſwer, Why more now than in 1662. when all readily complyed with and approved the like alterations? but I believe more noiſe is made of this Objection, than there is truth

truth or reason in it; perchance there may be some few ignorant and weak People, that may be over zealously affected to these matters among us, but they being our own, I hope are capable of being better instructed by us; than to think any of those things in which the alterations are desired so sacred as not to be meddled with: For this is to attribute that to the appointments of men, which is due onely to the Divine institutions, and is a sinfull superstition, in which they ought by no means to be indulged, but are as to this to be corrected, and better informed by us, under whose care they are.

And thus far having shewn you what necessity is upon us to consent to the alterations that will be proposed in this present Convocation, from the great obligation we have to remove the Scisms and heal the Divisions that are among us, I shall in the second place shew you another reason of this necessity from the promise, whereby we have obliged our selves so to doe. For the Bishops, in their Petition to King *James*, promised that they would come to a temper with the Dissenters, whenever put in a legal way, and this promise all the Clergy in the Land have seemed to approve of by owning that Petition in which it was contained, as they all plainly did who refused to read that King's Declaration in compliance therewith; and therefore now we are put in a legal way by being called together in Convocation, we are bound to make this Promise good. For hereby we have not only raised the expectations of the Dissenters, but also of the whole Nation too, who are earnest for the sake of the publick good and peace of the Kingdom, that the differences between us should be composed; and if we doe nothing in complyance herewith, what can we expect, but that the general clamour of the People will be raised against us hereon, as a base and false sort of men, who can promise fair in times of adversity, and forget all perfor-

performances when they are over, and we become the reproach of every man hereon. I know the answer hereto is, that the Dissenters will do nothing on their part towards this temper, and that after all that we can doe on ours we cannot have assurance that any one of them will come over to us thereon, and therefore it will be in vain for us to proceed any further on this Project. To which I reply, First, That it is by no means true, that all Dissenters are so averse to a reconciliation with us, as this answer suggests, for I know multitudes that on granting the alterations proposed would most gladly come in and unite themselves to us. That their Ministers are not so forward as to this I believe to be true, because they having many of them very beneficial Conventicles, where they have a more plentifull Income, greater respects, and a larger power than they can hope for in a Church Benefice, would rather for the sake of self interest continue as they are, and have no Comprehension at all, than to be brought into the Church thereby to their loss. But with the People I know it will be otherwise, who will in large numbers come in to us as soon as those alterations shall be in our Churches; and when they are once come off, it will not be long ere their Ministers also will be forced to follow. But, Secondly, suppose it true, That no Dissenter at all would be brought over to us by the Concessions proposed, yet I say that we are still bound as well by interest as duty to perform what we have promised: For by doing our part herein, first, we shall leave them without excuse, if they be not satisfied thereon, and deliver our selves from abundance of their clamour, which we are now continually vexed with by them on this account. Secondly, we shall thereby give satisfaction to the Nation, who expect this from us, and fix them thereby the more firmly to us. For say we what we will of the strength and number of those

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that are for us, let us not deceive our ſelves, As they that are zealous for the Diſſenters are no great number, neither are they that are zealous for us. The main body of the Nation I look on to ſtand indifferently affected both to them and us, and although they now come to our Churches, yet are they as ready to joyn alſo with them were they in the publick Miniſtry, as in the times of *Cromwell* hath been ſufficiently made appear. For they think not the Controverſie between us of that moment, and therefore cry loudly to us to agree, and take it very ill that ſuch diſcords and diviſions ſhould be ſtill maintained in the Nation ſo much to the prejudice of the publick peace and ſafety about ſuch trifling matters as they think them to be which we contend with each other about. And at preſent I muſt tell you they are readier to caſt the blame of all this rather on us than them becauſe they are now the ſuffering party. But if we do our part on this occaſion, and make all thoſe ſteps to peace and agreement which are propoſed, we ſhall not onely ſet our ſelves right with them as to this, but if the Diſſenters do not hereon come in and comply with us, they will ſo plainly manifeſt themſelves thereby to be a ſort of obſtinate and unreaſonable people, that the whole Nation ſhall condemn them and juſtifie us, and be thereby firmly fixed on our ſide ever after. But on the contrary if we do not our part, but break our promiſes, and reject the preſent opportunity put into our hands of doing our beſt towards the reſtoring peace to this poor divided Church and Nation, which all now ſo earneſtly deſire, and the exigency of our preſent affairs do make ſo neceſſary for our ſafety, we ſhall ſo far loſe the people of the Land, and give our Adverſaries that advantage over us thereby, as I fear may become our total ruine.

But, Thirdly, another reaſon there is which ſhews the neceſſity of our doing what is propos'd, becauſe if we do not

not doe it most certainly the Parliament will. For it may be very well remembred, that in the last Session the Bill past the House of Lords in order hereto, and when it came down into the House of Commons it was by their desire that the matter was referred to us, and if we now do nothing in it, you may assure your self the Parliament will resume it again, and doe it their own way, and they have the whole thanks for it, and we onely the odium of the whole Nation for refusing it. To prevent which let us not cast the present opportunity out of our hands of doing the thing our selves: for we as Divines are best able to doe it as it ought without prejudice to the Church, whereas if we cast it into the hands of Laymen, they may instead of altering Circumstantials strike at Essentials, and so make a breach upon the Religion it self to the undoing of all. And although this should be avoided, as I fear it will not in some particulars I could instance, as particularly in that of our Orders, yet the least mischief we can expect will be totally to extinguish all Convocations for the future, and resolve the whole power of the Church into the two Houses of Parliament, and thereby perpetually fix that reproach of the Papists upon us, that our Religion is a Parliamentary Religion. And whether the Church of *England* is now met together onely to be *felo de se* is that which the Members of this present Convocation are earnestly desired to consider.

But in answer to all this your third head of Objection tells us, That how necessary soever this may be from the abovementioned Reasons, yet this is no proper time for it, when so many of the Fathers of our Church, and other eminent persons of the Clergy by their Suspension stand incapacitated to act with us in this matter, and that because if this be now done, when their consent cannot be had in the doing of it, they will renounce it all,

and by ſticking to the preſent Form create a new Schiſm among us, and thereby as great a breach be made in the Church on the one hand, as poſſibly can be made up on the other. And this I hear is a reaſon much inſiſted on to defeat the whole deſign and intent of this Convocation. But in anſwer hereto I muſt tell you thoſe excellent perſons are very little beholding to them that talk of them at this rate, there being nothing that can be a more bitter Libel againſt them. For is it poſſible to imagine that thoſe who have ſo eminently ſignallized themſelves in the defence of the Church, and ſo readily yielded themſelves to be Confeſſors for it (as all well know in the late Reign) ſhould now on a ſudden turn their hands againſt it to wound and deſtroy it, and all this onely out of a deſperate peeviſhneſs, becauſe they have ſome infelicities at preſent upon them which none of us can help. Far be it from thoſe eminent Fathers of the Church to become guilty of ſo great a wickedneſs againſt it, and I muſt tell you it is impoſſible they ever ſhould, whatſoever ſome men may talk hereof to ſerve their own purpoſe. For how can they who have ſo long preached and wrote againſt Schiſm and the wickedneſs of it in ſeparating from the Church without a juſt cauſe, now become guilty hereof themſelves, when there is no cauſe at all to drive them to it? Should we indeed put any thing either into our Liturgy or Conſtitutions, which is contrary either to the Doctrine or the Precepts of our Religion, I muſt confeſs then there would be reaſon for them to ſeparate, and I my ſelf would make one of their number; but thoſe that are moſt hot againſt the deſign of this preſent Convocation do not tell us that any thing of this is likely to be done therein, and therefore we may ſuppoſe the Liturgy after its preſent review will have nothing of this therein, and that any then ſhould ſeparate

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from us in that where they can find no fault to object is a thing that cannot be imagined, but of such onely as are most perversly bent against Reason and Conscience to doe all the wickedness they can to gratifie a peevish humour. And therefore those that talk after this rate of those excellent and most Religious persons have a great deal to answer for to them for the injury which they doe them by this slanderous and vile imputation. But since they will have it so we will for once (begging their pardon for doing so) suppose what they suggest to be true, that those who are now of so tender a Conscience in reference to the Oaths, will have none at all as to this which is a much plainer case, but go on in opposition to all which we shall do in this present Convocation to make that Schism which they would fright us with, the hurt will be so little which they will be able to doe us thereby, as that it will not need either to be feared or regarded by us. For their number is so small, and the Proselytes they are like to get so few, and the resentments of the State will be so heavy upon them, as being enemies to them as well as us in this opposition, that they can no sooner appear in the Schism which is talked so much of, but they must immediately be crush'd and fall to nothing, and therefore to talk of this as some do, in so formidable a manner for the obstructing all the good intentions of this present Convocation, is a Scare-crow which Knaves may lift up, but none but Fools can be frighted therewith.

And thus far having shewn you the necessity which urgeth us to doe what may become us in this present Convocation, methinks the case is so plain, that I cannot imagine from whence it is that the present opposition may arise, unless it be that some, when they hear of Reformation, are afraid of their Church power and

Church promotions. If this be the matter, as I doubt it is, that makes ſo many hang off from the publick good of the Church at this time, I deſire they would conſider whether they doe not take the moſt effectual courſe to bring that about which they fear. If by ſuch moderate abatements as are required we give ſatisfaction to the Nation, they will be the better inclined to bear with us in all things elſe, and make the continuance of our eſtabliſhments more laſting among them. But if on the contrary, by our refuſal, we provoke them againſt us, I know not but that, inſtead of that moderate and juſt reformation which they will now be contented with, they may take the matter into their own hands, and bring us to that of *Scotland*, which we are ſo much afraid of, and deprive us of all. And of this we have a plain inſtance in the Caſe of the Council of *Trent*. Had they granted any moderate Conceſſions to the juſt demands of the *Germans*, and yielded them but ſome of thoſe things which are now a burthen to them, and which they would be gladly rid of, if they could with reputation, I doubt not the Church of *Rome* might have retained its power over the whole Latin Church till this time; but their jealouſie of this power making them rigorous to yield nothing, hath put them in the direct way to loſe all. And if we follow the ſame courſe, I doubt the ſame effect will enſue. In ſumm, ſuch bye ends are always moſt unjuſtifiable in Eccleſiaſtical Councils, in which no conſiderations of ſecular intereſt, but thoſe onely which may beſt tend to the Honour of God and the Salvation of men ought to influence all our determinations, and could we but all come together with this mind, I ſhould think our ſelves ſo ſure of the bleſſing of God upon all our endeavours, that I durſt promiſe you all the good ſucceſs from this Convocation that can be deſired, whatever appearance there may at preſent be to the contrary.

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As to the account which you desire of our Proceedings hitherto, I can onely tell you, that on Monday last we chose our Prolocutor, and adjourned to this day, and are now again adjourned till Monday next, and then we expect to have our Commission to act and fall to business. The first thing to be brought before us will be the reformation of the Kalendar, that is, whether the Apocryphal Lessons shall be struck out or no; and here I apprehend the main Question will come to the debate, whether Alterations, or no Alterations: If the latter be carried, you will have your desire, and I my liberty again to return home, where the old saying, *Quos Deus perdet dementat*, must necessarily have that influence upon my mind, as to make me fear our total ruin cannot be long behind after so great an infatuation; if it must be so, I am sure our sins have deserved it, and God endue us with Patience to submit thereto. I am,

Sir,

Nov. 27. 1689.

Your affectionate humble servant,

A. B.

FINIS.